Taylor Huntington

WRTG 1320

Professor Deb Moore

October 23, 2012

Advising Appointment: 10/24/12 1:00-1:30

Another Synthesis Essay…Someone Shoot Me

Families are always changing, whether on the micro level (children growing older, the birth and death of family members) or on the macro level (the rate of divorce in the country, cohabitation or marriage). The standards for different genders has grown over the years from the working man and the stay at home mom, to women CEO’s and male nurses. These changes in turn affect how society views the relationships that make up a family. Many types of families have come under criticism for not living up to the traditional standards that some people still cling to. No one, let alone an entire family can please every critic in the world because a family consists of so many factors and components, which even people that love each other cannot met to society’s standards and goals. Authors that research and write on American families, debate on aspects that make up these units: marriage and what defines a family, single mothers, and divorce, are sublevels of the family that writers give background and support to their opposing views.

Pauline Irit Erera presents the term family as ever changing, constantly shifting with the rise and fall of the economy and American values. Erera has published many in depth works on different types of families: step-, foster, lesbian, and noncustodial fathers has become her main focus. This lets her present a positive assessment of marriage and family. Andrew Cherlin agrees with Erera’s view and adds individualism to the term family by quoting Supreme Court Justice Stephen Field saying, “marriage, as creating the most important relation in life, as having more to do with the morals and civilization of a people than any other institution” (437). The lay man’s version of this quote means that marriage depends on the culture a person resides in and how that society view’s marriage. James Wilson, author of “Cohabitation Instead of Marriage” offers a contrasting opinion on the definition of marriage, “Marriage is a way of restricting the freedom of people so that investing emotionally and financially in the union makes sense” (430). Wilson gives a darker assessment of the union of marriage than both Erera and Cherlin. Wilson believes that marriage exists only to raise children and keep the traditional family alive and states that “cultures set rules for marriage that were not only designed to protect the child but to achieve a variety of other goals as well” (431). Erera does not agree with Wilson but points out that traditionalists try to keep the family focused around children by only letting married couples adopt (423). Cherlin brings up a past work to point out that “the companionate marriage of the mid-20th century morphed in to the individualized marriage of the late 20th century” to present the change he sees in the meaning of marriage (435). This expresses both their assumptions that the definition of marriage is changing due to the shifting American values, and where there is marriage, there is divorce as well.

Cherlin brings forward the past of divorce and how it was frowned upon by the Catholic Church, and many Protestant families. Only in desperate cases were spouses allowed to divorce, the cases were termed adultery and desertion (434). Later on in the colonies that became America, some states legalized divorce and many couples moved to these states only to be released from their duties as a married man or woman (435). Cherlin barely gives in own opinion on divorce, but believes it has become more accepted into American society over time and this results in as many marriages as divorces. Wilson argues that divorce is not common as Cherlin presents it because divorce is “an elaborate and possibly costly legal ritual” (430). Wilson views divorce as a better solution than having a couple that cohabitates, because if he stopped loving his spouse while simply living with her then he could walk right out the door, versus having to put up with the expenses of a divorce (430). Erera again sides with Cherlin on the side that divorce is a commonplace action in today’s society. She states “in all cultures and era, stable marriage systems have rested upon coercion—overt or veiled—and on inequality” (423). She proposes that divorce has become easier to achieve because of the increase in the jobs available for women and the decreasing dependency they have on the other gender. While Wilson, contradicts both of the other authors, they all agree that divorce has become a quick solution to the problem instead of trying to work out the problem. They do blame this on the changing American values in society, and they turn their attention towards the offspring that is sometimes left in the aftermath of a divorce.

Andrew Cherlin, Pauline Irit Erera, and even James Wilson agree that children and the single parents that support them are a huge aspect of the changing family. Cherlin points out that unlike the growing acceptance of divorce, “there is no long-term social and legal tradition of ambivalence toward single parents who have borne children without marrying” (436). Erera agrees with his statement and adds that single parents will still deal with troubles whether they are divorced or not. She tells how the increasing numbers of mothers without being committed in a marriage see being a single parent as offering “greater satisfaction and security than a marriage of questionable stability” (420). She also views single parents as the movers and shakers of family diversity, and state that there is no difference in how the children of single parents are raised when compared to children raised by a heterosexual, married couple. She does point out in “What Is a Family?” that single parents are attacked and suffer high poverty rates, but take care of their children as best they can (423). Wilson contradicts the other author when he states that marriage produces “personal health, longer lives, and better children” (432). He views single parents as those that bring down the meaning of family and that children of single parents are highly affected in a bad way.

The three articles: “What Is a Family”, “Cohabitation Instead of Marriage”, and “The Origins of the Ambivalent Acceptance of Divorce” provide differing opinions and aspects of what changes the American family from past to present society. Though they agree on many points, their contradicting statements provide a view of the American family from three diverse views. When marriage sometimes leads to divorce and children are either supported by single parents or not, Erera, Wilson, and Cherlin offer their arguments as support for their side of the “family table”. Readers may never know which one is right, but all three writers prove that the American family is and always will be changing.

**Taylor,**

**As a whole, you weaved your articles together very well. However, you used way too much fluff. I would constantly find myself reading a sentence or two over and over again so I could try and figure out what you were trying to say. There was too much unnecessary information and a lot of repetition. I think once you trim up the essay, it’ll be fine.**

* **Austin**

**Works Cited**

Cherlin, Andrew J. “The Origins of the Ambivalent Acceptance of Divorce.” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 71.2 (2009): 226-29. Web. Rpt. in *Writing in the Disciplines: A Reader and Rhetoric for Academic Writers*, 7th ed. Ed. Mary Lynch Kennedy and William J. Kennedy. Boston; Pearson 2012. 433-37. Print.

Erera, Pauline Irit. “What Is a Family?” *Family Diversity: Continuity and Change in the Contemporary Family*. Sage Publications, Inc. Books. (2002); 1-15. Rpt. in *Writing in the Disciplines: A Reader and Rhetoric for Academic Writers*, 7th ed. Ed. Mary Lynch Kennedy and William J. Kennedy. Boston; Pearson 2012. 416-28. Print.

Wilson, James Q. “Cohabitation Instead of Marriage.” *The Marriage Problem: How Our Culture Has Weakened Families*. New York: Harper Collins. (2002); 38-41. Rpt. in *Writing in the Disciplines: A Reader and Rhetoric for Academic Writers*, 7th ed. Ed. Mary Lynch Kennedy and William J.Kennedy. Boston; Pearson 2012. 429-32. Print.